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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002581

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: TALABANI: IRANIAN UPDATE AND SEEKING POLITICAL  
SUPPORT FOR BAGHDAD SECURITY

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad per 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: The Ambassador, just back from consultations in Washington, met President Talabani July 17. Talabani briefed the Ambassador on the latest Iraqi discussions with the Iranians, and they discussed ways to leverage concerns about Iran into greater support for Iraq from Sunni neighbors. Ideas for getting Iraq's political hierarchy to take greater responsibility for Baghdad security were discussed and ideas considered for launching an intense political effort aimed at making Baghdad safe. End Summary.

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12. (S) The Ambassador expressed concern about Iran's intentions in Iraq. Given the lack of progress on the nuclear front, some Iran watchers fear that Iran will try to stir up even more trouble in Iraq in order to divert attention away from the nuclear issue or as a way to increase the price to the U.S. for pursuing sanctions against Iran. Talabani said that he'd just seen the Iranian ambassador who had invited him to Tehran and said that the President of Iran wants to visit Baghdad soon. Talabani assured Ambassador Khalilzad that neither visit would take place quickly. He said he told the Iranians that he himself should visit Tehran before Ahmedinejad came to Baghdad, and that Maliki should travel to Tehran before the President of Iraq. Even then, Talabani suggested he would take his time in getting to Tehran. The Iranian ambassador assured Talabani that Iran did not want its problems with "others" to affect Iraq and that Iran was ready to help with Iraq's security problems. Iran would sell arms to Iraq, provide training, and help secure Baghdad. He denied that Iran provided any support to the Mahdi Army, a gang of ex-Saddam loyalists and criminals. He insisted that the Mahdi Army was not under Moqtada's control, and Iran would support measures against them. Talabani relayed a conversation that the Iranian ambassador had had with Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, in which Barham had complained about Iran's "friend," Syria that was now openly interfering in Iraqi affairs and publicly supporting the armed resistance to the Iraqi government. Ambassador Khalilzad noted that the Iranians had tried to get the recent neighbors' conference to demand a timetable for withdrawal of Coalition Forces. Talabani said that he likes Mahmoud Mashadani's response to this demand: first, the Iraqis would demand a timetable from their own government on the capacity development of the Iraqi Armed Forces.

13. (S) Talabani and the Ambassador agreed that Prime Minister Maliki was particularly concerned about Iranian support for extremists in Basrah and that he feared the Iranians were trying to undermine him personally.

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¶4. (S) Ambassador told Talabani that he is concerned about continuing problems with Baghdad security. He had heard assessments that much of the violence was not random or motivated by personal revenge; it appeared that there was a purpose to some of it: to exert control over specific locations by chasing minority residents out of their homes and some political leaders condoned this. Talabani agreed and said he was beginning some initiatives on his own. He said first, the government would assemble the High Commission on National Reconciliation, which will have representatives from all parties and all sectors of Iraqi life. After that, assemblies of religious and then tribal leaders will be established. These were all steps outlined in the Prime Minister's National Reconciliation Program. He himself will invite two moderate Sunni shaykhs--Jamal Al Din Dabban, the Grand Mufti of Iraq, and a Shaykh Ziad, whom he described as the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brothers/Iraqi Islamic Party to help in the reconciliation process. If they were willing to help, he would even put them on his payroll. He was considering moving Shaykh Jamal Al Din from Tikrit to a house in Baghdad. (Note: Shaykh Jamal Al Din was detained by MNF-I briefly about 3 weeks ago when MNF-I broke into his house in Tikrit in search of one of his sons. End Note) At the same time, work needed to be done with the Shiites. Maliki had told him that Moqtada was ready to reign in the extremists in JAM. Talabani told Maliki that being "ready" wasn't enough; he needed to stop the "ethnic cleansing" conducted by Shiite militias.

¶5. (S) The Ambassador proposed that we approach Baghdad Security like we did the effort to conclude a constitutional

BAGHDAD 00002581 002 OF 002

draft: a continuous, high-level engagement plan. We had to identify who exactly was causing the problems and who had to be brought together to fix the problems. Maybe the newly begun Political Committee for National Security (PCNS) could be activated. Talabani said they needed to activate everyone and meet weekly. (Note: Talabani explained that the PCNS had just held its third meeting and resolved outstanding issues; the only two members that never came were Ibrahim Jaafari and Iyad Allawi. Talabani said many members were worried about Saleh Mutlak obstructing the work of the PCNS. Tariq Al Hashemi came up with a good requirement for membership: the members must recognize and support the political program of the government. End Note) The Ambassador said he thought the problem needed a daily approach and asked Talabani who should be involved. Talabani indicated the heads of the major political blocs, who should examine together who was committing the violence, why, and what should be done. Talabani said the marja'ia was ready to make an urgent public appeal. Ambassador and Talabani agreed that it would be important to get senior Sunni clerics working with the marja'ia and to move them from theoretical statements to an action plan. They also agreed that a system of neighborhood watches be established--although Talabani argued for them to be armed.

¶6. (S) Talabani then described efforts undertaken by Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Zowba'i who claims that he has identified leaders in Jordan (presumably from places in Anbar), Fallujah, and Abu Ghareib who are ready to work to secure their areas. The Anbar tribal leaders have promised to cooperate with the U.S. The Ambassador noted the recent New York Times article describing shifting Sunni attitudes on the coalition presence in Iraq. Talabani claimed that if Zowba'i's folks in Abu Ghareib could successfully secure their area for a month, he was ready to pay them for continuing to do so. Talabani then said he was ready to assemble the political bloc leadership within a few days and begin discussions with them on how to address Baghdad's security problems. After these folks came together, they could then proceed to bring in religious leaders and others.

Ambassador and Talabani also agreed on importance of joint religious edicts from Sunni and Shia clerical leaders condemning the killings and advising people to share information with the authorities on those involved in the violence. The Ambassador agreed with Talabani's thinking and they agreed to meet in a small group the following night with just a few leaders, such as Barham Salih, Adel Abdel Mehdi, and Tareq Al-Hashemi. The Ambassador said that if the leaders were unable to control their people, then security forces would have the political cover they needed to move against sources of the violence.

17. (S) Toward the end of the meeting, the Ambassador observed that the current dangerous situation with Iran in the region might also provide an opportunity to rally moderate Sunni states to support Iraq. He suggested that Arab leaders' perceptions of Iranian intentions and actions might make them more willing to increase their efforts to persuade the Sunni "resistance" that the greater danger came from Iran and it was time to make their peace with the new Iraq. Talabani agreed and believed Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE should do more. Talabani said that Maliki had been pleased with his trip to the Gulf and all had promised to help him. He said he spoke privately with King Abdullah and sought to assure him that he was an Arab and Iraqi first and that he need not fear Iraq would accept Iranian leadership.

KHALILZAD